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SUBJECT: PRT NINEWA: VP HASHIMI FOCUSES ON POLITICAL OUTREACH TO SUNNI ARABS DURING HIGH-PROFILE VISIT

Classified By: PRT Ninewa Team Leader Jason Hyland: 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Ninewa reporting cable.

SUMMARY

¶2. (C/REL ACGU) Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi visited Nineva on February 23 and 24 to meet with provincial government and security officials, members of his Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), university students and professors, and tribal leaders. He also conducted an aerial tour of the Mosul Dam, damaged Tigris River bridges, and the Syrian border. Local contacts tell us the visit was more about strengthening political support for the IIP and encouraging participation in the political process than securing reconstruction assistance for Nineva. The visit highlighted the province's increased profile as Coalition Forces (CF), the PRT, and the GOI look to redevelop Mosul in a post-conflict environment. CF and PRT, while playing a low-key role during the visit, provided extensive operational support. End Summary.

GOVERNOR SEES LITTLE BENEFIT IN VISIT

¶3. (C/REL ACGU) Governor Duraid Kashmoula, who is a Sunni Arab but represents Kurdish political interests in Nineva, characterized Hashimi's February 23-24 visit to Nineva as an overtly political attempt to build support for the IIP. He criticized Hashimi for his failure to deliver reconstruction assistance and address lingering budget execution problems. He drew an unfavorable distinction between Hashimi's lack of support for Nineva and PM Maliki's "superb and patriotic support" for the province. Kashmoula also disapproved of Hashimi's trip to meet western Nineva Shammar tribal leaders allied with Shammar Sheikh Abdullah al Yawr. Kashmoula and Sheikh Abdullah al Yawr, who the Governor dismissed as a "child," are engaged in a bitter rivalry for political and economic primacy around the Rabia'a border crossing in western Nineva. Vice Governor Khasro Goran, who is also the leader of the province's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), echoed the governor's displeasure that Hashimi has not delivered assistance to Nineva.

IIP LEVERAGES VISIT TO REINFORCE CONSTITUENCY

¶4. (C/REL ACGU) Local IIP leader Mohamed Shakir said that although Hashimi had failed to deliver specific assistance for the province as a whole, he had during a meeting at IIP headquarters personally delivered cash for victims of the late January Zanjali market blast, USD 50,000 for dormitory renovations at the insurgent-infested Mosul University, and USD 1,000 for students across the university's disciplines.

Shakir said Hashimi's visit was prompted by sheikhs in western Ninewa, who requested a meeting with the Vice President to try to increase their voice in national government decisions. He added that border security in the sheikhs' area is a primary concern. Shakir said Hashimi urged the sheikhs to set aside their fears over Kurdish dismemberment of Ninewa through the Article 140 process and instead focus on working with the GoI to rebuild Iraq.
(Comment: Hashimi's message on political participation is consistent with Shakir's political strategy in Ninewa. End Comment.)

VP REACHES OUT TO TRIBAL WEST

¶5. (C/REL ACGU) On 24 February, more than 100 Sunni Arab and Yezidi sheikhs met with Hashimi at Sheikh Abdullah's compound in Rabia'a, in what Sheikh Abdullah said was the first national-level GOI visit since 2003. While Sheikh Abdullah concurred that Hashimi did not deliver specific assistance for Ninewa, he said Hashimi engaged him on the question of providing additional Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) for the area. According to Sheikh Abdullah, Hashimi was happy with the message coming out of the tribal leaders' meeting that western Ninewa leaders should encourage their people to work within the current Iraqi government. Sheikh Abdullah said the IIP has historically been very weak in western Ninewa.

COMMENT

¶6. (C/REL ACGU) In a climate of increasing focus on Nineva's security and reconstruction issues, VP Hashimi's two-day visit to the province provided a fitting book-end to a month

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that began with Prime Minister Maliki's visit to Mosul. While his political focus was largely on the majority Sunni Arab community in this strategic province, he also continued a welcomed, new pattern of high-level Iraqi government attention on Mosul. The PRT will remain in close contact with provincial officials and urge them to interact with GoI politicians and ministries to secure badly needed reconstruction funds for the province. End Comment.

CROCKER